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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000099

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: GENERAL ABIZAID MEETING WITH DEFENSE MINISTER  
ALAIWA

REF: SANAA 36

Classified By: DCM Nabeel Khoury for reasons 1.5 b and d.

11. (C) Summary. General Abizaid met with Minister of Defense Alaiwa and Chief of Staff Qassemi on January 4. Abizaid briefed Alaiwa on current USG priorities in the region: The political transition in Iraq, continued worldwide pressure on al-Qaida, and resumption of the Peace Process. Alaiwa raised pending Yemeni purchases of F-5, C-130, Bell-Agusta Helicopter, and other spare parts, U.S. training and assistance for the Yemeni Special Operations Forces (YSOF), and asked for U.S. help in soliciting increased Saudi security and development assistance for Yemen. End Summary.

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Abizaid on Regional Priorities  
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12. (C) General Abizaid briefed Alaiwa on the USG's top three priorities for the region in 2005. He said he was hopeful the new year would bring a resumption of the Peace Process and that following the Palestinian Authority Elections to expect the Administration to take an important positive initiative. Abizaid told Alaiwa that stabilization of Iraq and moving forward with the political transition was another top priority. The mission of the USG, he said, was to assist stability by building Iraqi security forces, on the upcoming election, Abizaid continued, we expect to face continued difficulties with the insurgency in Iraq but the vast majority of Iraqis want to vote and desire a stable situation in their country. Continued worldwide pressure on al-Qaida, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan remains a top priority as well, said Abizaid, expressing his desire for continued and increased US - Yemen cooperation in fighting the GWOT.

13. (C) Defense Minister Alaiwa told Abizaid that he was generally satisfied with US security cooperation and assistance to Yemen, but asked for his personal intervention on a number of FMF issues. Alaiwa complained that he continues to wait for six million USD in spare parts for the air force namely parts for C-130s, F-5s, and four Bell-Agusta helicopters currently grounded. Chief of Staff Qassemi added that the ROYG had learned from the al-Houthi rebellion that special forces require special training and equipment and repeated requests for USG assistance to train and equip three YSOF Units.

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Yemen is a Time Bomb -- Need Saudi Assistance  
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14. (C) Alaiwa reported that Saudi-Yemeni relations have improved since reaching a border agreement, but that the KSA was not doing enough to assist Yemen in controlling its border, or for that matter, in assisting Yemeni development in general. "There is a great discrepancy in wealth between us and our Saudi neighbors," said the Defense Minister, complaining that Saudi only does the minimal and should do more including providing jobs for Yemenis, allowing more guest laborers, and investing in Yemen's economy. Alaiwa described Yemen's underdevelopment, poverty, and population growth as a "time bomb" that threatens the entire region, implying that the KSA has a responsibility and an interest in helping defuse it. Following a recent trend of senior ROYG leaders appealing to visiting senior USG official to weigh in with Saudi Arabia, Alaiwa asked Abizaid to "tell our Gulf friends," to give more assistance to Yemen.

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CT Cooperation Should be a Two-Way Street  
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15. (S) Abizaid raised current AQ threats against maritime targets and oil infrastructures in the Gulf region, saying that he trusted the ROYG was exchanging information and cooperating closely with the USG on this matter. Alaiwa replied that such threats were indeed out there and that "we need your information on this." (Comment: Alaiwa's response illustrates current USG frustration with the ROYG on intelligence sharing which can often be a one-way street. During his visit Abizaid pressed officials, including the President, for more complete information sharing on the part of the ROYG. End Comment).

16. (S) Abizaid pointed to USG attempts last fall to fulfill Saleh's request for US reconnaissance overflights of areas where al-Houthi forces were thought to be operating. We remain ready to provide such assistance Abizaid told Abizaid and Qassemi. (Note: When the USG was ready to conduct such operations, the ROYG turned down the offer having already put down the rebellion. End Note). Chief of Staff Qassemi told Abizaid that they still required photography as well as mapping assistance for several parts of the country, including the Sa'da, Marib and Shebwa regions. Abizaid replied that the USG remains ready to assist with overflights.

17. (S) Alaiwa said he was satisfied with ROYG progress in fighting and routing out AQ cells in Yemen. He said that there have been important successes and that the population was on the side of the government in this fight, but added the caveat "we are dealing with al-Qaida after all."

18. (C) Comment: The MOD and ROYG military staff are likely frustrated that the most successful USG security assistance programs fall under purview of the Ministry of Interior -- the Central Security Forces Counter Terrorism Unit and the Yemeni Coast Guard. The Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) at Post reports extensive difficulties in working with MOD officials, who complain to every visiting US official about parts and other acquisitions they need, while failing to file the necessary DOD paperwork to receive the materiel. In a positive step, Alaiwa has recently acknowledged the ministry's lack of ability to work with the FMS/FMF system. To address this problem, Sanaa OMC is funding travel and training for MOD officials to the US for training on how to navigate the U.S. defense acquisitions and assistance environment. The first group of Yemeni military officers will travel to the U.S. in February to begin this training.  
End Comment  
KRAJESKI